

**PRACTICE PASSAGE 1**

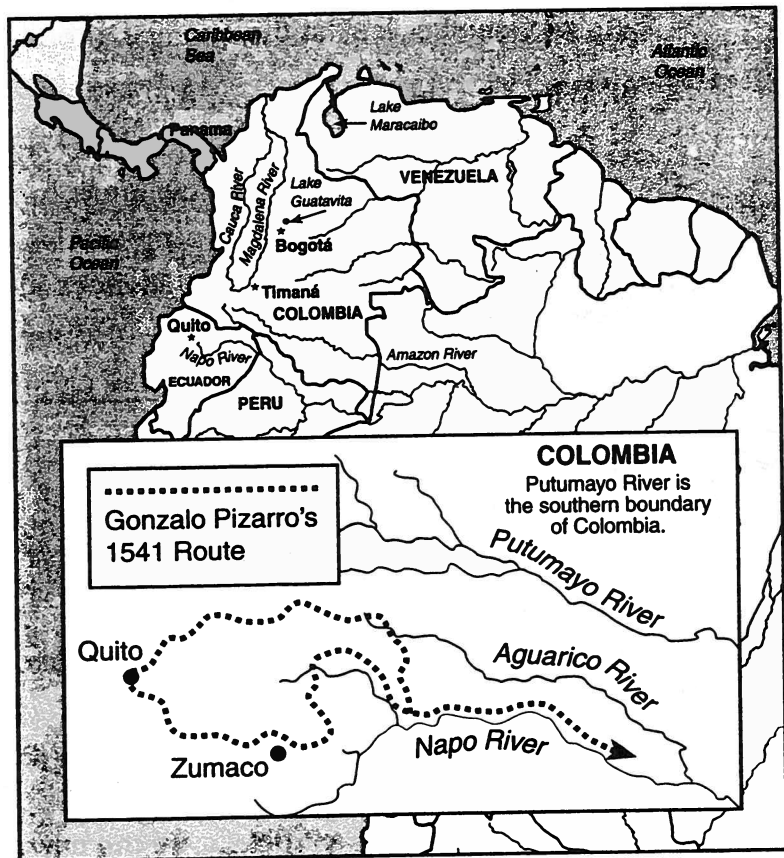
Directions: Read the passage and answer the questions that follow.

## *The Legend of El Dorado*

by Julian Green

In 1541, rumors began to spread throughout the colonial city of Quito, Ecuador. Spanish conquistadors<sup>1</sup> heard that a native trader was telling tales of a rich king from a faraway land. The great ruler was said to cover his body in gold dust from head to toe. At the end of each day, the king would wash the gold away, and the next day he would be painted anew. The Spaniards referred to this wealthy king as *el dorado*, Spanish for “the golden man.”

The conquistadors already believed that beyond the mountains east of Quito lay wide, flat lands thick with cinnamon, a valuable spice, and that gold was most common around the equator. They had been amazed by the gold dust in the soil of the Timaná region, and the wealth of the Muisca tribe nearby. The Yalcones Indians, in particular, had fought viciously to repel the Spanish invaders from Timaná, leading the Spaniards to suspect that an even greater land of riches awaited them beyond. The conquistadors also knew that many of the Indian tribes painted their bodies to keep cool and ward off insects, so it seemed natural that the lord of a rich land would paint himself with gold dust. Eager to find gold and cinnamon, the conquistadors began to seek the gilded man’s kingdom, which they now called El Dorado.



<sup>1</sup> **conquistadors** (kon KEESS ta dors): conquerors, from the Spanish *conquistadores*

Over the next few years, new elements were added to the legend: The golden man rode a raft out onto a sacred lake and offered a sacrifice of gold and jewels, dumping them into the water. The native trader telling the story was now a citizen of Bogotá, Colombia. All this served to whet the conquistadors' appetite for riches.

### **The Quests for El Dorado**

Gonzalo Pizarro, a Spanish explorer, was the first to undertake a great expedition in search of cinnamon trees and the land of El Dorado. In 1541, he gathered more than 200 Spanish soldiers and 4,000 native slaves and set off eastward from Quito. Typical of the conquistadors, Pizarro was a ruthless leader. When the quest remained fruitless, with no end to the dense, hilly forests and no rich, flat lands in sight, Pizarro commanded his men to torture the Indians until they revealed the secret location of El Dorado. Under Pizarro's command, the Spaniards put hundreds of Indians to death, stretched on racks, burned, or thrown to the dogs. Still, the mysterious land of El Dorado eluded him.



**Gonzalo Pizarro  
(1506–1548)**

One local chief, Delicola, had heard of Pizarro's cruelty. When the explorer came through, Delicola made plans to avoid the torture of his people. He told Pizarro that the rich lands were further down the Napo River. Pizarro was excited to hear this good news and pushed on, but his men found nothing. Other Indian leaders were not so clever; within two months, Pizarro had captured the chiefs of four different tribes and threatened to kill them if they did not help him find El Dorado. The chiefs swore that there was a wealthy land up a river to the east and then made their escape.

The Spaniards were having a rough time as well. Pizarro had led them into the untamed Amazon rain forests, where they had to hack through the dense foliage. They were plagued by mosquitoes and vampire bats, by alligators and snakes, and by an evil fog that seemed to carry disease. They became so hungry that they ate their horses and the soles of their shoes. Hundreds died along the way.

Pizarro eventually returned to Quito without finding the fabled city of El Dorado. He regretted ever beginning the quest. Yet his failure did nothing to deter others from setting forth. Another Spaniard, Quesada, and a German explorer, von Hutton, both led expeditions in search of gold that year. Over the next century, dozens of parties would set out looking for the mythical land; all of them failed. Even the famous British explorer Sir Walter Raleigh, ignoring the perils of the jungle and the poor results of other attempts, undertook two unsuccessful quests to find El Dorado. On the second trip, Raleigh's son Wat was killed, and Raleigh returned to England in shame.

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### **The Treasure of Lake Guatavita**

In the 19th century, although the city of El Dorado was widely thought to be a chimera,<sup>2</sup> people from around the world, driven by visions of riches, began to plunder South America again. Some of the original Spanish explorers had determined that part of the El Dorado myth was based on the Muisca practice of sacrificing gold and jewels by dumping them into Lake Guatavita, a perfectly round lake high in the mountains of Colombia. As early as 1562, repeated attempts had been made to drain the lake and uncover the Muisca treasure. Although some gold and jewels were found, it was never enough to offset the costs of draining the lake.

In 1904, a group of entrepreneurs used steam pumps to empty the lake, only to find a few small trinkets. The following spring, the lake was full again, and treasure-hunters remained convinced that Guatavita held a fortune at its center. Several more lake-dredging expeditions were conducted, using everything from deep-sea divers to metal detectors to suction pumps in order to find the precious gold. Finally, in 1965, the Colombian government restricted excavation of Lake Guatavita to archaeologists, and the plundering came to an end.

### **Paradise Found**

The "real" El Dorado was never found, but its namesake can be found everywhere on U.S. maps. There is an "El Dorado" or "Eldorado" in Arkansas, Illinois, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. There is an "Eldorado Springs" in both Missouri and Colorado. Hardly a grain of gold was mined in most of these places, but the legend of El Dorado symbolizes the attainment of ultimate fortune. It is easy to see why pioneer settlers chose to name their towns after the mythical kingdom of "the golden man."

<sup>2</sup> **chimera** (ki MARE uh): an illusion or fabrication of the mind; an unrealizable dream